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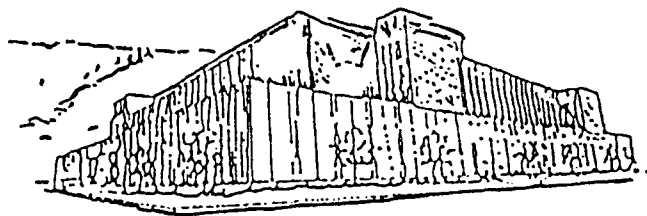
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Cargo

Poems by

Shan Simmons

B.A., The University of Alabama, 1993

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

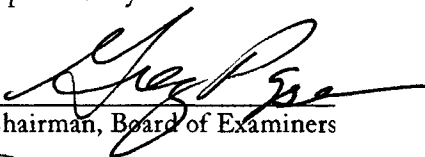
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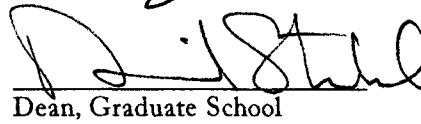
Master of Fine Arts

University of Montana

1996

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I

MIME

Off Canal, he polishes
the alley breeze
with a transparent chamois.
I stop and ask if he
can frame the shape of God.
One eye cries a black tear.
He steps into my shadow
and spies through light
from the first window
he conceives, measures,
then mends the wind
into a flight of stairs.
He folds the sky into a roof,
spreads out carpets
and brings in a table and chairs.
He points to my seat,
brings me tea,
then circles, but he
will not look at me.
He weeps into his white gloves.
He grabs a brush
from his back pocket,
paints each window shut,
pulls the curtains tight
and turns the gas on high
but does not light it.
He leans toward me,
sighing fumes into my eyes.
He bolts the door
from the outside.

SQUIRRELS IN RUSH HOUR TRAFFIC

The air tangled with radio waves,
sun-braided steel and chrome,

they convene on the shoulder
as though in prayer, ready to stray,

to see what the other side
branches into, or maybe

a family visit, or three friends drunk
on old cherries and bent

on risk. They bound about
busted tires, shattered glass,

pass the first white line and dart
before a van, Cadillac, Mack,

one more stain married
to the angry highway.

The others never look back.
How hastily they became strangers,

how they scampered into another
heaven forgetting they aren't alone.

MATIN

The sun fills every crevice with silver light.
Morning's hide of ice shimmers,
and a fox and kestrel have come
to the edge of the oaks and firs.

I wish for the stolen forest to rise up
in the midst of its uses, marching back
in armies of furniture, pencils, planks
and paper, lowering again its roots
in the paths of prey and predator.

Might each grove once more tower green
from the ground where turf stands
sodden with yesterday's rain.

Might heat send the vines coiling up
the mended lattices of homes
where people look out to see
the missing shades approach
across the fields, the air
full of breath.

RETURNING TO HEAVEN

Heaven has no scent,
no prints from mortal feet.

No one's in yet, yet
its one window blooms.

The mirrors
and the parking lots empty.

The stages wait,
all the bands on call.

Einstein's still tampering
with the lock, his fingerprints awesirl.

He has failed
and he knows it.

Look how his hair
gets in the way.

*

Jesus is on his
way with the wine.

The fountains braid their oils,
and God has set the tables,

arranged the husks of ice,
and hung the butterfly confetti.

Lightning stitches itself
into the clouds.

No thunder.
He calms the startled light

which climbs him
as though it might drown

and begins talking
to himself again.

NOTHING BUT HER DANCE

Three Fridays ago I heard her cry,
and when I reached the beach
an outboard fled toward the moon.
I assumed some kids were just having a fling.

The **Courier** gave her thirteen lines
in 7C, *Local Exotic Dancer Missing*,
until the old bar pilot two doors down
found near his dock the high heel.
Divers combed our jetty for the body,
and locals gathered, chattering theories.

Headlines receded to page three,
then four, and talk of new fishing spots
on the Eastern Shore and fear
of lost jobs at the cannery resumed.

The water refused to reveal her,
and I sink with her in my sleep.
Breathing the bay into my dreams,
I lie beside her, her hair feathering
my cheek, and I wait

for her limbs to flow again,
full of the water's sway
where dolphins line up in the light
of a swollen moon, churning
so she may rise, remembering
nothing but her dance.

Gulls and pipers circle,
starlight strung between their beaks.
She spins through them,
wrapping herself in an array
of broken light and finds her way
back into the night.

ANGELS

Chichi won't do. These girls
are shiny through and through.
They gather around the fountain
to shave their snowy legs
and tuck their candy.

They pluck their eyebrows
and play with each others' curls,
gossiping about new galaxies.
They apply their eyeliner mined
from the corners of the Universe

light can't find, mascara
you could pave roads with,
lipstick so carmine
it wouldn't pass for blood,
every shade of shadow for their eyes.

This one has wrecked her hair
with stars. That one has a river
braided in hers. Hurricane skirts
and rainbow wraps everywhere.
She has a wig of lightning,

moons dangling from her ears.
That one has fire stitched
into her garter. Here there are more
pleats than in any sea. All of them
padded with clouds.

Their wings flash down the length
of the parade, strung with comets,
hung with satin and camlet.
Scarves made of dyed wind, corsets
so tight you couldn't slide a hair in.

High-rise heels, miles of sequins
and chiffon. Mountains
of lamé, boas made from God's
great birds. O hell,
now the DJ's here.

Tiers of stages descend
beyond sight. The disco ball would

(no stanza break)

blind mortal eyes. A spectroscope would
burst if turned this way.
Who would know what to do?

They'll never be through.
This is Heaven, girl.
There's only one order and it ain't
savoir-faire. Even the finest painter
couldn't bring himself to stare.

APOCALYPTIC LOVE SONG

A smile dies in the dark, smashed and scattered
into waves that gnaw at the moon.
We share our faces, and in the crowd
we find a child swollen with ants.
The ghosts refuse their meals.
By a barricade five black birds
peck a dog to death and bathe in it.
The graves distend. Our scars
begin to shine. I tell you,
Change is the wardrobe of death.
The stars line up like gears,
and we move too close
to the sun. We soften and float.

A PORTRAIT OF YOUNG EINSTEIN
for Betty Florey

Assume it noon: pigeons lighting,
their shadows ballooning inside the arcade.
Light feels for shape around his profile--
not even an absent smile,
lips loose as he croons a line
from *Moonlight Sonata*, hair askew,
eyes full of reflections: runes,
staved in the lines of his fusil gaze.
Sleepless, he nods, jaded
with thoughts of unborn shapes.
On the Aare skiffs scrape the banks,
jostling crates of grapes.
Two gray desks are shaded
with papers, an inkwell, typewriter.
No sign of Father Time
whispering in his ear.

TO GOD

I, your drab bard, keep barking,
praying that sleep leaves you
each day, your spider agility
remains, your knees rust
slowly. Tracks pock
the ground you've trekked.
I must find you. I smell
your soft bones.
Your shadow must molt
like old felt. Your weeping
sounds like fiddles
melting under bows.
Do you see each tear's trail
harden my face?
I will bathe you if you stop.
I will brush the strands
of light on your head,
sew your torn lips
and kiss your ears,
swollen with requests.
I will hold a mirror
to your face
and remind you
what you saw.

CATHEDRAL

*(after a photograph in the Philippines c. 1944
by W. Eugene Smith)*

The Bishops's stole is stained
with wine. The acolyte stares
toward the black clad mothers
and lovers that kneel
with bare feet on the stone floor.
Before the crucifix which hangs
over the exit sign, a girl
with three braids names angels.
A burnt soldier squirms
behind her. His gauze whispers.
Beside him is an empty cot.
The family came to take
the body an hour ago.
The girl prays for her brother
stationed on the shore,
his rank no longer important,
so close to the line. She wonders
if his spirit is all that is left alive,
hung in the sky above the dome
frescoed with a mourning Mary,
where caught prayers
swirl like steam.

LETTER TO A LOST LOVER

Christmas Eve, drunk, I drove past your house to see
you still live at home. I imagined you downstairs with your guitar,
knotting the air with notes.

The moon still slides down the sky as though
it will land in the cul de sac where the trail begins
threading through the pines toward the field
where we smoked dope, drank Wild Irish Rose.

Past the last lights and wreaths I stopped, remembering
the dead end streets we found, each place we hid:
coal roads and roads turned dirt,
moonlit ribbons riffling toward the river.

Remember that first night, a winter fog
no moon pressed through? We rose unfinished
to make curfew, but my car wouldn't start.

We walked five miles for help. I felt less queer than ever,
like a god who had found another to share his hidden heaven,

not the god you came from after church one Sunday,
saying you couldn't anymore.

I hope you know by know that love is not afraid,
and I loathe the god that made us strangers.
I wish that god into flames
burning so perfectly, nothing remains.

CARGO

1

It is a road painted white that leads
to the end of a field where
milk thistle burns through the night,
where the house waits,
its one room filled with a piano.

We go there and stare into the sun
like two lovers singing to each other
as they make love, as they edge
toward the bright black sky, tiny,
tiny like heaven.

We empty the piano before the player comes,
before he makes true his promises
about all the blistered water,
the perfectly wet metal,
more rain than the air can hold.

2

With a moon in each eye
we started toward where we began.
We were the song we sang,
the road behind ignited,
the road ahead blind.

I wondered how our mouths would look
when they stopped. We
talked about the poems in our shoes,
their pages on a string.

We talked of unimagined things
and blew smoke into the flowers
in our laps. We weren't far.

*

She stood at the door of her shop
with her television on,
her eyes bruised,

her hair: spot-lighted static,
her trailer glowing out back.
She gave us a chocolate covered lock

(stanza break)

and said, *go*.
We said, *but what about the knife*
on the moon?

3
The cast calls for a devil: one able to snap
his tail so as to deafen.

The rain begins. Everyone
hurries to collect it, but it turns
into glue, and if the clock tower bell
is time, then time is broken, my lovers.

Look on with the eyes of a zoo.

Everyone else is late, and I
am not yet strapped to the stone.

WHEN GOD WOULD NOT DREAM ME

I dropped into God's dream.
I saw I was I, but God
would not look at me.
I tried to speak.
Nothing made
a sound. I reached
for my tongue.
It kept rolling
from my hands.

I watched an angel
land. I found him
kneeling among the reeds,
sipping rain from
an owl skull. Wet light
seeped from his
broken wing
and the haze lay down
to sleep on the waters.

I saw he was me.
I kissed him. I parted
his back and let light spill
into the ethers. I slipped
into his skin so I
could begin my flight,
yet unimagined,
yet unspoken.

They pulled me
by my braid, and out
with me came the rain
I gathered there,
where I curled
in the mud. The air
rang with my first word.

AMERICA

Without a face I was born,
without a mind.

The worms laced my infant pulse.
The animals came to mate

in my hair, to rest
in the folds of my hide.

And then the men dragging
their kin: their muddy children,

their grimacing wives.
They brought their gods.

I tasted their lies.
I resisted their maps, their wires

where words huddle,
my breath knotted with signals.

How do I look, swallowed in light?
My heads swell with dreams of flak.

The shadow of my back stretches
across the clouds.

How many promises do you need?
How many eyes to see me

with my wings wake the wind
that bends and drapes the dead audience?

My windows wail, inhaling
curtains in houses riddled with bones.

And your silence is paid for, you droning
crowds. Come to me,

weary, lock-eyed hordes, droll lords.
I am in love with your absence.

I will never remember you again.

CLOTHESLINE

Three taut lines whir and hum, but not a tune
to wrap the wren song in the eaves of the house.
The father's trousers swagger, drunk on dahlia fumes,
knees faded, but not from prayers. The mother's blouse

shrugs. Pairs of shorts flail as they run,
gust-heavy. No one comes to take them from the rain.
No one comes to mend this dangling gait.

The father's pajamas swat the camisole.
The skirt flowers against a sheet, pressed
like a bloom between pages of a old
bible buried in a bottom drawer's mess,

yellowing like these husks they finally tear
for rags to clean spatters the home wears.

LIES I LEAVE

In grade school
Carrie Stewart decided
I was a *homo*
and told the class so.
My friend Johnny broke
the forks off my bike
and proclaimed, *nobody*
likes fags; fags go to Hell.
I wondered if I'd carried
my books the wrong way
and tried to change my voice,
but nothing I changed
changed the faggot.
No one could save me
from those epithets;
telling would somehow
make them real.
Now, I wish I could say,
I made me this way,
and these aren't the only
lies I'll leave.
Yes, I became
what you believed.
Let my name be yours.
Let your Hell have me.

IN HEAVEN'S LINE

This corridor is sticky
and the angels look like thieves.
We're already light-blind;
we've yet to see the gates.

I didn't ask for this.
It's cold as a wax museum.
Who will know me
without my frown?

They'll ignore me
like everyone else.
I don't want to know about
all the things I don't yet
know about myself.
I don't want to burn

more flowers, and I refuse
their language.
Nobody's going to marry my soul

with silence or force
clarity upon my mind.
I'll stand behind that light.
And if what I say
only matters once--
let it be now!

I'll take twelve hells
to wear nothing
but my seat belt
and just drive.
It's only dreams for me.

And when I dream,
I'll dream I'm falling
as peacefully as a cat,
steering my long black soul.

ANGEL OF DEATH

I've imagined you in every clash:
between elephants,
fenders, phobias, flames, power lines,
piles of branches, anything,
test site sand.

Nothing reminded me.
I waited to poke each dollar
you have left down your throat
and roll up your shadow to smoke it.

Now the trumpets fling
their tongues. Now I drop
you into the sun.

II

TOWN NAMED MOTHER

for Meghan Howes

Garbage collectors huddle
behind the buildings
trading abduction fantasies.
Cigarette butts roll across sidewalks
in the square. The lady
beside the mannequins
stares out toward the cop kicking
at pigeons. A man runs
from the deli on fire. He trips
over a leash. The drag queen
on Sun Street yells,
Yes! But I am Nausea,
Queen of Bulimia. And you can kiss my bliss!
What flashes up there?
A disc full of moon dwellers?
A pie pan? Hubcap? A jock strap hangs
from a telephone pole.
The swollen crows
will make a nest with it.
Can the workers at the candy factory
ignore the hum forever?
The secretary at the medical waste center
thinks her ear loose,
thinks the child she carries will combust.
The stadium is full of tears.
Ducks probe a syringe
on the city hall lawn. Sick gods
stand at the city limits
with their thumbs of air held high.
Two men enter a drug store's
psychedelic white with panty hose
on their heads. The mayor
tries to gash his shadow.
A baby in the park swallows a half dollar.
A man at the bus stop ignites
his hair with a childproof lighter.
The newspaper boy pisses
in the fountain where two poodles bathe.
Everyone craves corn dogs,
but the venders are late.
The phone clangs in Patty's Pub.
The caller asks for *Anna Lingus*.
The lone man at the bar asks, (no stanza break)

Isn't she a movie star?
A suitcase lands in a pool.

THEY DON'T FEEL PAIN
for Rebecca

Sometimes when the sky beams blue
and my cats seem joyful, I bake fish,
but first I call the grocery to see
what kind they have and how much.
Thirty-one cats swagger from their
bowls satisfied. They deserve it
because they keep me well,
all of them greeting me at the door
after a day spent digging
through dumpsters for their meals.
Always there with raised tails
and grins. You can't get that
from people unless you pay.
Cats come free and beautifully humble
like sheep. Clean as band-aids
and pure in every soft hair.
I would have ocean perch in the oven now
if there hadn't been a knock
at the door. I couldn't answer.
It had to be the police, and I've got
library books two weeks past due
because my boyfriend burned them up.
My mother always told me the authorities
scoop one of your eyes out
and make it harder for you to read
because you keep the taxpayers from their
fair share of knowledge. And I guess
not everyone knows that Jesus ate fish
because they don't feel pain.

INSOMNIA

A nightmare would satisfy
in this room I've made
windowless, where the blind
now dream my face
printed with the swirl of sheets.
Do the clouds swell?
Does the moon spread out
its stain? I want to fall
through a bottomless silence.
I want the darkness in every egg.
Bring no shadow
to this bed. Hang the husks
of all utterance like hats
on the rack of my ear.
Wind the clock to death.
Hoist the sun-noose.
Heave me from among
these twittering streets
into mapless dreams.

LAST LINES FOR LITTLE BROTHER

It's odd how sleep walks
backward in time and you watch
with me the robins that nest
in our tree house.
The tall fields we roamed
like small fish are still wet
with morning. Baseballs roll
again onto Mason Avenue.
Rising from the puddles
we pedal over, splatters
find our faded shirts.
Gusts off the afternoon train
beat the tips of the pale grass
to the ground. We wait to grab
our hot, flattened pennies
from the tracks.
The procession tapers out of sight,
leaving me with the hollow sound
of that train I've awakened to.
I smell the creosote
of the crossties we made dares on;
everything seems
as accidental as dreams.

CAHABA PSALMS

Autumn

The scarred oaks click.
The Cahaba rushes
like a black snake,
slithering off under night.
The bearded bank shivers.
Rain reminds
the water of its surface
with all the light
it can gather and slows
finally into snow,
bringing shape back
to land lost by the moon.

Spring

Cahaba Trail winds
through a carpet of clover,
molded into waves
by the wind. The river
weaves beside the path,
reminding shapes
of themselves. It wavers
above silt and releases
its song over the stones.

FELO DE SE

I fold in God's blink:
watery window
behind which nothing
will wake-- not one thing
noticed without my gaze.
Shadows become
what cast them and fade.
My name uncoils
from pages like a fuse
untangling.
Oceans find themselves
light. Stars unburn,
whorling into lost time.
No terrible wings
hang above me, no harps
on fire, no dreams, no rain,
no one left to say,
Let the wind wait.
Let my exit deafen.

LE FÊTE: LOVE POEM

The monkeys clap and stamp.
They love the poem.
The birds grin at the clowns.

Down the midway our clothes
are caught in the calliope.
It stutters its last tune and chokes.

I close my eyes.
I rise into my dress
and ride into your tent

where the cats drink the bath water
and the snakes lose themselves
in the maze of our bodies.

THE SMALL GIRL

Before he stepped onto the Greyhound, God
spat at the moon. He had grown tired
of sleeping in the rain and began to fear
the nightmares he was having:
the ones where he becomes an airplane
with sharp red teeth. He tucked his beard
of hummingbirds into his robe
and ran his fingers through his hair
which has the texture of falling milk.
He pulled out his spider marionette
so it could dance. The small girl beside him
was unimpressed and opened her satchel
full of mirrors. God fidgeted and sweated.
The girl wiped the honey from his brow
and licked her fingers. God asked
if she would like a new looking glass.
She declined and reclined. He twirled
his necklace and stroked his caduceus.
He wondered, *will the cherubs
remember to unlock the gate?*

SAFETY

Last night the house was too safe.
After all, it is Satan's birthplace.
Notice how the entrance refuses light.

No, there were never any doors.
Please avoid those holes in the floor,
and note that they lead

to a system of tunnels which
rivals modern mining.
There, on the glass stage

his puppets slipped on their tears.
No matter how much they
begged, he wouldn't let them quit the show.

This is the bucket in which
he drowned his first rabbit.
This, the first clock he woke to.

Yes, the smells sting.
You can see the fumes in the dark.
And the wind might eat you yet.

No one knows how the plumbing
ever remained intact. The water reflects
nothing. His parent's whereabouts unknown.

His most-loved doll, Rebecca, lies
there in the corner of the room.
...his first guitar

...the crib where he had his first dream.
Do you remember? He dreamed
in reds and he dreamed of you.

MENTAL HOSPITAL ROLLER SKATING DAY

Every other month they come to the rink:
Jennifer, who spits at her skates
Albert, who wants his wheels pink
and rows like he's in a boat,
Maudie, who used to throw snakes
from high rises, James, who got caught
crucifying road kills, Isaac,
who ganws on doll heads,
Sally, who draws mud bodies on beds,
the woman with the invisible dove,
and the boy who wears latex gloves,
all followed by two men in white coats,
Frank and Joe, who wait on their benches
to make sure no one lights up smokes
or shits in their britches.
They visit from noon to three and, oh lord
they skate, twitching like sacks full of birds,
running in place as if the boards
beneath them might cave, repeating words
like wee or whoa as they roll,
swimming through the music
or hugging walls. Today, James forgets
he's not here to bowl,
and Isaac chooses to reveal
his not-so-private-privates.
No matter what the DJ plays,
they squirm and flail, grabbing at the disco lights
as though they are commandable,
a bendable kind of bright.
Maudie swings on the beams
as if they were vines.
The sign lights up for couple's skate
and none of them pair off or even pretend,
too in love with their amazing shadows.
The DJ likes to see if they have started to *date*,
but no one has dedications to send,
floating along like angels dewinged and lost in songs,
careful not to roll off God's wooden palm.

PRODUCE

In late May they pull three benches
from the shed to the oak's shade
and line them with cardboard pints
and quarts of green and red peppers,
tomatoes and blackberries.

Mrs. Gladden leans in the swing,
snapping beans under the waver
of fly paper. I hear a clatter and turn
to see Mr. Gladden tinkering behind
the hood of his tractor. The banty hens
scatter when he crosses the yard.

I check the sweet corn for worms
as he rubs the grease from his hands.
I ask him how he keeps the peas alive
during such a dry time. He tells me
that he planted early because of signs
in the weather. He says, *If you plant
a broom at the right time and the Lord
wills it it'll bloom.* He grins
and asks me if I'd like a hamper
of squash. I nod and he takes
my bills. He pushes them into
his pocket, and I wonder if he
will bury them in the back yard,
if after a shower, they will flower.

HER HANDS

The slick asphalt hisses
with tires. He has watched
rain slide down
his window all morning,
waiting for his wife.
Thunder rattles his room
on the eighth floor.
The flowers shake
and scatter their petals.
Grace returns with
his whiskey and razor
and says the Lord's Prayer
in the hallway.
She soaks cloths
until they warm
and bathes him like she
did on summer nights
when heat coiled heavy
as smoke and she came
to caress him
with a towel after
making love. She lifts
lightly his left side
that numbed with stroke,
afraid she will slip,
and dresses him
in a new gown.
Each dawn she wakes
in the chair
beside him, his
blanket draped over her
so he still may feel
her move. She rises
to hold him up when
he must piss. He eats
by her hands now
as their children did.

MAPMAKER

1

The map has no edges.
I unfold it and roll it out.
It opens and opens:
water, land, land, water.

2

The stillness startles me.
Nothing like a tangle,
nothing like colors at odds.

3

The sun revises the clouds.
Leaves grow over that sky.
My hills lie like green leopards.

4

Where will I put the stones
or streams that run under sand?
Should I stunt the hungry hands
and mouths of land
or let them crowd the bays?
Which canyons will I hide?

5

If I come to a place
that can't be crossed
I leave rope.
When rope won't work
I leave a sign.

6

No one will find me.
All I need is my pen.

7

I leave my voice
in the wind and my clothes
in the brambles. No rain
moves my touch. No wave
swallows my song.

THE MESMERIST

Come, take a seat on stage. Give up your mind.
I can dance you away from your shadow,
take your face from a mirror and swallow
your ears like water when my chant is done.
Every part of you gone numb is mine.

What I tell you, you make true: each howl, tear,
squawk, moo, jump, jerk, hoot, achoo or screech.
The aged will be babies, giants mere
mice, men as ladies, ladies men,
when I coax you from your chair, steer
you into the aisles unable to disagree.

MESSAGES FROM THE HOLY ASYLUM

1

Someone calls a lost dog.
Someone I can't see holds my hand.

I guard the higher dimensions
with a flashlight and a bat.

I make those noises
you can't find.

I give my shoes to the museum.
I see the moon quaking

and I do not scream.
Everything is barely anything.

I hurry love.
I hurry the boiling sweat.

No net can catch me.

2

All the men
in the city are in drag:
a messy rainbow.

In the miles of falling paper,
in the sea of cartoon hair,
one phone rings, one bed
gets made. Everyone

buries their mirrors. Everyone
wears only flowers.
The night turns silver

and the empty buildings
rise into it with ease.
No one knows the meaning.
No one practices my death.

MY BURNS

*"Now the serpent was more crafty than
any of the wild animals the
Lord God had made." (Genesis 3:1)*

Don't pretend you don't know me.
I've tracked you with my tongue
and come to you, a pulsing light
hung in the orchard like a chiseled sun.
Comely I become if longer you look into my eyes.
My lips are rich fruit,
yet there is one fruit richer.

Just burst the skin and know that God
has lied. You can't die.
I never cry for you. I never cry.
Let me kiss your mind.
Let me bring us away without a word.
Let us scale the night.

DAY ZERO

*"Then I saw a great white throne
and the one who sat on it; the earth
and the heaven fled from his presence,
and no place was found for them." (Revelation 20:11)*

It was simply a bad day in this universe.
He could smell the earth no matter
where he went. Why bother with
another project like that?

He leapt so hard
from his bed that he popped
a stitch. His tongue blistered,
yet he tasted the sugar of his tears.
He pulled off his
hood of eyes. His pulse
hardened as he tossed away
his ears and stepped
off the edge hugging himself.

RESURRECTION

You did not send the knife pie
this Christmas, and I wonder
if you're alive. Prison smells
like a morgue. They freeze
the murderers so as not to actually
kill them. The food
makes old men grow. We crouch
giant in our cells.

I dream underwater.
I dream of flying there. The harpist
throws his harp from the plane
and dives after it. I tie
all of the sheets together
and toss them to him.
He plucks all the way
to the ground. The music
becomes you.

Sleep peels off me
like a golden wrap. Smell
my rare skin? I don't feel.
You can call my brain.
I am full of bruised water,
and I must collide. The comet
is headed to its bed.

Take these wires
and tickle me. I will tell
you secrets-- how my eyes
are caves where you fall.
The day I stop dying,
I am born into the starving sky.

The windows dance,
each pane a colorless body
wrapping the air.
When I grind my explosive teeth
you don't care. I rise
into my reflection. Remember
not to reach for me
or I drown.

THE GREAT FIRE

I live above an abortion clinic.
My favorite word is heal.
The rooster in my room
did not die while the aliens had me.
My puzzled rat buried its head
and my puppets wept,
the whole room restless as a zoo.
I put on my hard hat.
It had to mean disaster.
My clock stopped.
The roof cracked and paint
blistered on my walls.
I heard the squalls
hauled out in pails below.
I felt like I was breathing plastic,
and I kept thinking
why didn't the Wise Men
get a better place than a manger
for Jesus. Angels screamed.
I stepped into the deafening alley.
I hated my mouth
but I stayed on the street preaching.
The Great Fire's on its way.
The flames will scoop up the wicked.
This day will not quit quitting.
People gave me money.
I bought a gun.
I told people, *hootchie, cootchie.*
The sun buzzed all day.
I hid the unborn in the snow.

MY HELL

*"...and there was no one to till
the the ground--" (Genesis 2:5)*

All souls writhe in my palm
like tangled vapors.
One day, I'll take you
from your feet and rename you.
You won't question me,
just as a river never doubts the sea.
You see as I see before you.
You move because I move
behind you. I'll make the day
that will not stop.
Don't drop to your knees
if you happen to see me
dancing through the trees.
Don't stare either. I'm naked,
and I don't want to hear complaints.
Whatever they are, I'm not to blame.
Why did I have to get bored
with a simple garden?
One evening I found myself
contemplating my reflection
and thoughtlessly,
I peeled up my soiled shadow
and let my image bleed
onto it. I shook it out
and there you stood breathing my air.
At first you seemed afraid
to look at me, but time
would prove you peevish, cavorting
through my topiary, trampling
my blooms, not satisfied
with the proper fruits and fun.
Where did you get
those wild plans? You created sins
I'd never conceived.
Will I ever make a Heaven
to appease you?
You are Hell.